



# Submission cover sheet

## Inquiry into men's suicide rates

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Standing Committee on Social Policy  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601  
By email: LACommitteeSP@parliament.act.gov.au

**8 August 2025**

Dear Standing Committee on Social Policy,

**ACL's Submission to the Inquiry into Men's Suicide Rates in the ACT**

On behalf of the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL), I am grateful for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy (Committee) in relation to the [Inquiry into Men's Suicide Rates](#).

Thank you for your careful consideration of this important matter.

Yours Faithfully,



**Joshua Rowe**  
NSW/ACT Director, Australian Christian Lobby

# **SUBMISSION:**

## ***Inquiry into Men's Suicide Rates in the ACT***

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### **AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN LOBBY**

#### **About Australian Christian Lobby**

The vision of the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) is to see Christian principles and ethics influencing the way we are governed, do business, and relate to each other as a community. ACL seeks to see a compassionate, just and moral society through having the public contributions of the Christian faith reflected in the political life of the nation.

With around 250,000 supporters, ACL facilitates professional engagement and dialogue between the Christian constituency and government, allowing the Voice of Christians to be heard in the public square. ACL is neither party-partisan nor denominationally aligned. ACL representatives bring a Christian perspective to policy makers in Federal, State and Territory Parliaments.

[acl.org.au](http://acl.org.au)

## Summary

The ACL commends the ACT government for initiating this inquiry into the disturbingly high rates of male suicide. It is an important subject. In the circumstances, we have confined ourselves to addressing items 1b and 2 of the Terms of Reference (TOR). In summary our recommendations on these points are as follows:

- **1b – Factors contributing to suicide rates (risk-taking behaviours, including alcohol and substance abuse disorders).**

Our submission focusses specifically on problem gambling as a contributing factor (whether direct or indirect) to male suicide. Other important issues, not presented here, might include online addictions such as pornography, excessive gaming and other forms of escapism. These behaviours ultimately disconnect men from reality, which in turn gravely impact real-world relationship and responsibilities. This can lead to isolation and emotional detachment, which impacts negatively on mental health. The ACL recommends male-targeted public awareness campaigns, digital literacy programs and early interventions through educational facilities and community partnerships to combat these behaviours.

- **2 – Promotion of positive health behaviours among boys and men, including increased access to mental health services, socialisation opportunities, and emotional supports.**

The promotion of male-positive narratives in education, media, and community development would go a long way to countering the feelings of social isolation and shame that are upstream of these concerning suicide figures. The ACT government should consider partnering with faith-based organisations to provide holistic mental, emotional and spiritual support for men. In addition, there is a need for more opportunities for young men to be mentored in the acquisition of skills (particularly skills that require practical application and teamwork, for example, in trade, sport or volunteer services) that engender a sense of growing competence and purpose.

Our submissions are discussed in greater detail below.

## Submission

### Overview

Suicide is acknowledged to be a complex, multifactorial problem. Immediate drivers are most often associated with the personal circumstances of the individuals concerned, about which statistics can tell us very little. Having said that, the fact 3 in every 4 suicides in Australia are completed by males<sup>1</sup> is a sufficiently strong statistical signal that sex is a significant factor. Other factors include age (83% of deaths by suicide concerned people under the age of 65) and remoteness (an issue which does not affect the ACT to the extent it might do other states and territories).

According to ABS figures, the most common psychosocial risk factors (not specific to males) are:

- Depressive episode (35%);
- Suicidal thoughts (30%);
- A personal history of self-harm (21%);
- Anxiety disorder (14%);
- Problems in relationship with a spouse or partner (13%);
- Disruption of the family by separation or divorce (13%);
- Problems related to other legal circumstances (10%);
- Acute alcohol intoxication (10%);
- Death of a family member or person in primary support network (9%);
- Harmful use of alcohol (9%).<sup>2</sup>

It can be expected that most cases engage a number of these factors and that there is an inter-relationship between them. Also, there will be causes of stress to individuals and families that do not immediately feature on this list and which nevertheless contribute to problems in relationships, family breakdown, anxiety and depression as inter-related problems. For example, particular stressors known to contribute to depression and suicide include: problem gambling; online addictions such as pornography and gaming; idleness; dysfunctional families; fatherlessness; social isolation; and a lack of healthy male role models.

Our main focus in this submission is on problem gambling, not because this is necessarily the most significant of these issues but because it is one which the ACT government can meaningfully address. Problem gambling needs to be recognised as a health problem, data collection in relation to gambling-related suicide deaths should be improved, mandatory cashless gaming cards should be introduced for all poker machine gaming in the ACT, and the recommendations of the Federal Murphy Inquiry into Online Gambling should be implemented.

A further suggestion is that the ACT should establish a Minister for Men, given there are Ministers for Women and Children. There should also be increased focus and funding for programs that encourage 'healthy masculinity', male mentorship programs, chaplaincy, and community programs to help equip the next generation of men and fathers and to improve mental health outcomes and prevent suicide.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2023, there were 2,419 male deaths with an age-standardised rate of 18.0 per 100,000; there were 795 female deaths with an age-standardised rate of 5.8 per 100,000. ("[ABS data summary 2023](#)", Mindframe [website]. Accessed 8/08/25).

<sup>2</sup> "[ABS data summary 2023](#)", Mindframe [website]. Accessed 8/08/25.

## 1b) Factors contributing to suicide rates: Problem Gambling

There is a strong link between problem gambling and suicide. In some instances, the link can be made directly, as with the 2020 suicide of Raimo Kasurinen, following the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars on poker machines at the Hellenic Club in Woden, ACT.<sup>3</sup> In other cases, problem gambling features as an important factor in a constellation of inter-related issues that combine to elevate the risk of suicide.

A 2023 population-based cross-sectional study conducted by Angela Rintoul et al., in Victoria between 2009 and 2016 found that 184 suicides were directly related to gambling, accounting for 4.2% of all suicide deaths during that period, and an additional 17 suicides involved 'affected others,' such as family members, bringing the total to 201 cases.<sup>4</sup> The study noted that gambling-related suicides predominantly occurred among socioeconomically disadvantaged men. According to Rintoul et al., the true extent of gambling-related suicides in Australia is likely to be significantly higher than the raw figures indicate. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' ability to systematically capture gambling-related suicide deaths is limited, as it relies on death investigations and documentation. Gambling issues are often kept hidden from family, friends and health professionals, and coroners do not routinely investigate whether gambling was a contributing factor, creating the potential for underestimation. Rintoul et al., cited the superior reporting methods used in tracking gambling-related suicide in Hong Kong, where research shows up to 20 per cent of all suicides were related to gambling.

The impact of problem gambling is particularly felt by individuals and families on low incomes. Participants in a 2019 Tasmanian study on this specific issue reported: relationship stress and breakdown; food insecurity; ill-health caused by the stress of gambling; extreme levels of debt; attempted suicide or thoughts of suicide; and, thoughts of breaking the law as a result of gambling. The report authors noted,

*"These impacts also had serious consequences for their families and especially their children. This research found that gambling expenditure need not be at a high level for negative impacts to be experienced by people on low incomes."*

*Most of the participants reported that they started gambling to escape loneliness, boredom or stress; that winning was what they most enjoyed about gambling; and that gambling represented to them an opportunity to socialise. However, after their first 'win', which they generally used to purchase special items for their household that they struggled to afford on their regular incomes, participants found that any money won gambling ended up being put back into gambling."<sup>5</sup>*

Since 2001, the periodic ACT Gambling Survey has sought to monitor trends in gambling participation, risk, and harm. The most recent iteration of this survey found:

- Online Gambling Participation and Demographic Profile Online gambling participation has increased to 26.9% of ACT adults, continuing a clear upward trend across past surveys.

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<sup>3</sup> Courtney Barrett Peters, "[Hellenic Club fined \\$1.2 million over problem gambling of Canberra man who later died by suicide](#)", ABC News, 30 January 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Angela Rintoul et al., "Gambling-Related Suicide in Victoria, Australia: A Population-Based Cross-Sectional Study," *The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific* 41 (December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2023.100903>.

<sup>5</sup> Margie Law, House of cards Problem gambling and low income earners in Tasmania, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare, 2019, 1.

- Participation is highest among men (32.5%), particularly those aged 25–54 (~37%), with online gambling less common among women (21.6%) and people aged 65 and older (14.5%).
- Online gambling is also more prevalent among residents in Tuggeranong (29.7%) and Gunghalin (33.0%), those born in Australia (28.3%), people in paid employment (30.9%), and individuals without tertiary qualifications (29.7%).
- Sports betting and online lottery ticket purchases are the most common forms of online gambling.<sup>6</sup>
- Frequent gambling – defined as gambling at least weekly – was more common among younger adult males. 7.6% of men aged 18–39 and 1.6% of women aged 18–39 gambled weekly, compared to lower rates among older age groups.<sup>7</sup>

The link between problem gambling and suicide underscores the need for comprehensive public health strategies. Experts advocate for measures such as inclusion of gambling in Australia's National Suicide Prevention Strategy, improved data collection on gambling-related suicides, increased funding for mental health services, a joint federal/state/territory taskforce to reduce gambling related suicides, implementation of the recommendations of the Murphy Inquiry into online gambling including a total ban on gambling advertising, and implementation of policies to address the underlying causes of problem gambling.

## 2) Promoting positive health behaviours among boys and men

### *The cultural denigration of masculinity*

Rapid changes in western culture, particularly since the 1970s, have reshaped gender roles in ways that are now recognised as having had an adverse effect on boys and men. Areas of competence that were formerly exclusively male are no longer so. OECD figures demonstrate that girls are consistently out-performing boys in education<sup>8</sup> and this translates into career advantage, which leaves boys and men behind. At the same time, government-supported education and public awareness campaigns – the Respectful Relationships curriculum and certain OurWatch advertising campaigns, being examples – underscore systemic male advantage/privilege/violence as an ongoing problem for girls and women and implicitly shame boys for failing to align with social norms which centre traditionally feminine traits and denigrate traditionally masculine ones.

Positive virtues such as courage (including moral courage), strength, responsibility and leadership, are regularly misrepresented as 'toxic' and 'harmful' if exhibited by boys or men. The predictable result is boys and young men who feel excluded from the social rewards that would normally incentivise a positive contribution to the social fabric and commitment to building enduring relationships.<sup>9</sup> Forms of escapism, including online gaming and pornography, magnify these problems because they foster idleness, disconnection from reality, and a failure to mature emotionally. These problems contribute further to male mental health decline.<sup>10</sup> Pornography consumption, for example, undermines

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Rockloff, Alex M.T. Russell, Matthew Browne and Nerilee Hing, [2024 ACT Gambling Survey](#), Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory, Central Queensland University, prepared for the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission, May 2025, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> [Gender, Education and Skills: The Persistence of Gender Gaps in Education and Skills](#), OECD, 2 March 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Barry J. The belief that masculinity has a negative influence on one's behavior is related to reduced mental well-being. *Int J Health Sci (Qassim)*. 2023 Jul-Aug;17(4):29-43. PMID: 37416841; PMCID: PMC10321463.

<sup>10</sup> Tsui YY, Cheng C. Internet Gaming Disorder, Risky Online Behaviour, and Mental Health in Hong Kong Adolescents: The Beneficial Role of Psychological Resilience. *Front Psychiatry*. 2021 Oct 15;12:722353. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2021.722353. PMID: 34721101; PMCID: PMC8554051.

healthy sexual development, fosters unrealistic expectations, and disconnects men from meaningful relationships, further intensifying loneliness and shame.<sup>11</sup> Findings show that stressful experiences, anxiety, and depression are strongly related to pornography consumption.<sup>12</sup>

### *The problem of family breakdown*

There is an intergenerational cost to these problems because an absent and dysfunctional father and/or the family breakdown that results negatively affect the health and wellbeing of children, including their ability to form healthy relationships in adulthood that provide familial stability for their own children. A lack of strong male role models – particularly fathers and mentors – has left many boys without a clear vision of manhood. Warren Farrell who co-authored the book *The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It*, wrote in the Washington times: “the frequency at which fathers are absent has been devastating for the development of boys.”<sup>13</sup> Farrell pointed to research showing that boys without fathers fare worse than boys with fathers on more than 70 different metrics. They are much more likely to drink, use drugs, be depressed, suicidal, be violent, be imprisoned and (in America) more likely to commit mass shootings.<sup>14</sup>

Because these problems are complex and involve inter-related factors, many will be outside the ability of the ACT government to influence. At a minimum, however, the ACL recommends that anti-male messaging should be removed from the curriculum; counter-veiling messaging, which promotes a positive view of masculinity and male social contributions, should be encouraged. In addition, consideration should be given to measures that support young men to break the unhealthy intergenerational patterns they may have experienced through family breakdown and to access help in doing so. A study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) has found that reframing help-seeking information from feminine language to masculine language such as responsibility, bravery and rationality has had better outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

### *Young men who feel they lack purpose and direction*

Although data is lacking and sources are anecdotal, the ACL is aware of many ACT parents of young men in their late teens or early 20s who are at a loss to know how to help their children find purpose and direction. In the absence of the structure and discipline that employment provides, these young men can drift into unhealthy habits, wasting years that ought to be some of the most productive of lives and that would, in other circumstances, be put to good use in

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<sup>11</sup> A report commissioned by the ACL on the social impacts of pornography can be found here: Elisabeth Taylor, "Pornography as a Public Health Issue: Promoting Violence and Exploitation of Children, Youth, and Adults," *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, vol. 3 (2), 2018. <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2018.03.02.08>

<sup>12</sup> Privara M, Bob P. Pornography Consumption and Cognitive-Affective Distress. *J Nerv Ment Dis.* 2023 Aug 1;211(8):641-646. doi: 10.1097/NMD.0000000000001669. PMID: 37505898; PMCID: PMC10399954. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10399954/>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Mass shooters-absent fathers link ignored by anti-gun activists. Bradford Richardson. 2018. The Washington Times. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/mar/27/mass-shooters-absent-fathers-link-ignored-anti-gun/>

<sup>15</sup> Mental health, men and culture: how do sociocultural constructions of masculinities relate to men's mental health help-seeking behaviour in the WHO European Region? <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/332974/978928905130-eng.pdf?sequence=3>

establishing a foundation for a healthy and fulfilling adulthood.<sup>16</sup> It is a matter of deep concern to many parents. It is also something where strategic government intervention could potentially make an important difference.

What these young men need is structure, purpose, direction, mentoring in practical skills, and a sense of developing competence that will allow them to take their place in the world as adults. There is an opportunity for the ACT to show national leadership in identifying opportunities for these young men to engage constructively and in developing programs that would facilitate that engagement. For example, programs that incentivise businessmen who are established in their trades to mentor young apprentices, encourage young men to engage with community activities, such as sports clubs, men's sheds and volunteer organizations such as the RES.

In addition to addressing the social issues that contribute to suicide, there is a continued need to support community-based efforts focused specifically on helping people who have already reached crisis point. Examples of such programs include:

- The Salvation Army has been assisting people in crisis, including those impacted by suicide: Salvation Army Officers, counsellors and chaplains provide support and encouragement to people whose lives have been devastated by the loss of a loved one through suicide. The Army also provides information and training programs through Hope for Life, which is intended to assist individuals to respond appropriately to "people who may be at risk of suicide and to those who have been bereaved by suicide".
- The Wesley Mission offers assistance through LifeForce, a national suicide prevention program that educates the community about suicide, how to recognise the signs of suicide, and how to intervene effectively. The program is targeted primarily towards people in rural and remote communities, men aged from 25 to 45 in the workforce, and young people with literacy and social support issues who are no longer in school. Longitudinal analyses of national suicide data showed that on average, the introduction of Wesley LifeForce Networks reduced suicide rates by 7 percent. This pattern of effects was most pronounced in the third quarter after Network introduction, with a significant reduction of 17 per cent in suicide rates.<sup>17</sup>
- Organisations such as Anglicare, Lifeline, Teen Challenge also provide valuable assistance to individuals at risk from suicide.

## Summary of suggestions

Acknowledging that the drivers of suicide are complex, it also seems that there are many things the ACT government could do to help address the social issues that contribute to this problem. Measures that the ACL suggests are worthy of further consideration include:

1. **Develop strategies to address problem gambling**, particularly in high-risk populations.

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<sup>16</sup> Brett McKay, founder of the Art of Manliness, attributes "the modern crisis of manhood" to an indefinite extension of adolescence which leaves young men "adrift and lost, never sure when and if they've become men. Today's men lack a community of males to initiate them into manhood and to recognise their new status." (Brett and Kate McKay, [8 Interesting \(And Insane\) Male Rites of Passages From Around the World](#), Art of Manliness, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Networks evaluation summary. February 2021. <https://wesleylifeforce.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Wesley-LifeForce-Suicide-Prevention-Networks-evaluation-summary.pdf>

2. **Develop a specific Men's Strategy** to address issues such as mental health, suicide, specific health issues: Include the promotion of attributes that speak to a positive vision of masculinity including responsibility, bravery, rationality, purpose, courage and meaning as core to any "mental health" strategy aimed at men.
3. **Establish a Minister for Men within the ACT Government:** ACT currently has portfolios for Women, Children, Young People and Families, but no Minister with responsibility to advocate for men and issues such as men's health, men's suicide rates, and their mental health.
4. **Correct the anti-male messaging in schools:** Different but good and valuable in their own way. Remove anti-male messaging from the school curriculum and government publications, ensuring all children are encouraged and empowered to develop their gifts and talents.
5. **Promote a positive vision of masculinity:** In addition to existing positive narratives regarding women and girls, there also needs to be masculine-positive narratives in policy, education, media, and community development that celebrate responsible masculinity.
6. **Develop strategies to address the known problems of digital addiction especially pornography and gaming:** for example, through public awareness campaigns, digital literacy programs, support services and school-based interventions.
7. **Recognise, fund, support and partner with men's mentoring, chaplaincy, suicide prevention and community programs:** that connect older men with boys and young men to guide them through adolescence and into adulthood.